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SUBJECT: CAMEROON: FORMER CHILD LABORERS SHOW THEIR TALENTS

Summary

¶1. (U) To highlight the scourge of child labor and to showcase the talents of those Cameroonian children who have escaped it, Embassy Yaounde -- piggy backing on the ILO's International Day to Combat Child Labor -- put on a fashion show and handicrafts fair in the Chancery June 13 where former child laborers displayed their considerable abilities. Some 25 associations and 200 children took part in the gala event which ministers, parliamentarians, supreme court judges and members of the diplomatic corps (250 in all) attended. Sales of clothing, pottery and other handicrafts were brisk and the guests were justifiably awed by what the children created. A sobering ILO film about child labor in Cameroon gave many guests their first introduction to the problem here. By all accounts the event, which was designed to raise awareness about child labor and support its victims, was a huge success. End Summary.

Talented Seamstresses Strut their Stuff

¶2. (U) In an effort to offer tangible support to former child laborers who are trying to earn livings in other fields, Embassy Yaounde organized a fashion show and handicraft fair June 13 to raise awareness about child labor in Cameroon. Timed to coincide with the International Day to Combat Child Labor (June 12), the event brought into the Chancery some 200 children from 25 associations representing eight of Cameroon's ten provinces. Participants and guests donned red awareness ribbons ("Say no to child labor"). Many guests viewed the ILO film on child labor in Cameroon which included harrowing accounts from victims.

¶3. (U) As many of Cameroon's former child workers have learned seamstressing/tailoring as a trade, the event aimed to give these children (in particular) a boost. Almost all live hand to mouth, working on commissions only and with insufficient disposable income to buy fabric and supplies to make things they can sell in advance, or even to buy fabric to practice with. Embassy staff energized friends, families and colleagues who donated fabric and sewing supplies to the associations. Many of the products offered

for sale were crafted from these donated supplies. The proceeds will help the children in two ways: by covering school costs and by constituting a sort of "seed capital" to purchase sewing (and other) supplies so they can generate a more steady income stream.

¶4. (U) Almost 120 outfits (modeled by former child laborers, and American and Cameroonian embassy employees) made their runway debut in the fashion show. Even the Ambassador modeled an outfit designed by the children, to the delight of the crowd. Traditional clothing, everyday wear, cocktail attire and even a wedding gown were displayed. Everything shown was available for sale and several models literally had the shirts sold off their backs. The quality of the goods produced and the professionalism of the associations participating was remarkably good.

¶5. (U) The mood throughout the event was fun, festive and empowering. The children and the associations that support them were visibly moved by the Embassy's effort (100 Cameroonian and American staff participated) and Embassy staff and guests were equally moved by the children and their determination to improve their lot in life. It was a low cost (USD 3,500) event with high public diplomacy impact on the press, the invitees and above all the children. (Note: Participating groups received grants of USD 50-150 to cover sewing supplies, transportation and accommodations. End Note)

¶6. (U) Post wishes to thank the many Department employees, especially in AF and G/TIP, who donated fabric and sewing supplies for the event.
MARQUARDT